DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 804 JC 900 393

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TITLE Two-Year College Alumni Associations: Topical Problem Paper.
PUB DATE Aug 90
NOTE 16p.; Graduate seminar paper, Nova University.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Alumni; *Alumni Associations; College Presidents; Community Colleges; Financial Support; Literature Reviews; Newsletters; *Program Development; *School Community Relationship; *Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

One form of linkage between the two-year college and its community is a college alumni group. A review of the literature indicates that two-year college alumni organizations do not have a long history, and those which do exist are very recent creations. They can benefit the college by: (1) providing a good form of external public relations for institutions; (2) helping in various forms of fund raising; (3) prompting institutions to maintain current address and phone data, thus making follow-up studies easier; (4) offering scholarships for incoming students; and (5) serving as a source of volunteer help when needed. Their members can serve a valuable function as advisors on curriculum committees, and as resource people on career days. According to the literature, alumni appear to be attracted by at least three general groupings of activities: social events, such as travel tours and reunions; productive or functional events, such as committee service and fund raising; and fringe benefits, including preferential access to libraries and athletic events. Important guideposts to the creation of an effective alumni organization include getting the college president's support, assigning a staff member to guide alumni affairs, and developing a newsletter to keep alumni informed. (JMC)

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TOPICAL PROBLEM PAPER: TWO-YEAR COLLEGE ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS EMERGENCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AMERICA SEMINAR

by

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A seminar paper presented to Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Nova University

August, 1990

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One segment of "Emergence of Higher Education in America" has involved the development of the two-year college in its various forms. A section of the Nova study guide for this class deals with "The Future," and new directions for community colleges. In this segment, Bryant et al. (1990:136-137) comment on the work of the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges which emphasized, among other things, relationships between two-year colleges and their communities and service areas. Indeed, there are numerous methods of serving and linking with communities, but it would seem that one possible form of linkage could be some type of two-year college alumni group.

At McCook Community College, the first steps toward the formation of an alumni group have been taken. As an administrative assistant to the academic Dean and the President, one of my recent tasks was to edit the very first alumni newsletter. Having to do this task caused me to wonder if two-year colleges should have alumni associations, and if so, what useful function(s) they might serve and what desirable characteristics an effective one might have. Hence, a literature review of available ERIC documents on these topics was in order. Knowledge gained from the literature review of the aforementioned topics was used in developing a potential practicum survey instrument, the final product of this study.

That there has been some alumni association activity in

two-year colleges is indicated through a review of selected pieces of literature; however, such activity exists only within the last fifteen years or so. Kerns (1986:1) notes the minimal amount of literature available as she comments about historical background:

> Because there is little literature available about the subject of alumni programs at two-year colleges, I cannot tell you when the first alumni program was begun at a two-year college.

However, even though not much of a historical perspective can be established, a number of writers indicate that two-year college alumni groups are beginning to form. A staff writer for the ERIC Clearinghouse for Community and Junior Colleges (1984:2) says, "As community colleges become older, and their graduates more numerous, alumni associations are taking on larger roles in institutional support."

Somewhat along these same lines, Bender (1988:1), in a recent survey of 422 American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) affiliated institutions, comments, "It is clear that many, many colleges have recently established alumni programs, and that many more colleges plan to develop them soon." Kerns (1986:2-3) who earlier noted the lack of any documented history, does mention efforts at the time of her article to establish two-year college alumni groups in North Carolina, California, and South Carolina.

A word or two of summary might be in order at this

point. The writers reviewed thus far have generally indicated that two-year college alumni organizations do not have a long history, and thus, those which have been developed are very recent creations. Kerns (1986:3) does provide some possible reasons why such organizations have not been long-standing. She suggests that many community colleges are relatively new and have not had graduates in the work-a-day world for very long, alumni who transfer may be more supportive of the four-year receiving institutions, and finally, that community colleges (until recently) just have not made any commitment to alumni development. Reasons number one and three are offered elsewhere in the literature; however, reason number two (alumni more supportive of four-year) encounters some resistance from writers such as Rock (1979:118).

So then, the question becomes one of whether or not there are some worthwhile reasons for starting an alumni group in the two-year college. McCracken et al. (1980:4-5) believe that an alumni group can help maintain updated files on former students and can provide scholarships to incoming students. Certainly, community colleges are encountering increased demands with regard to "tracking" students after they leave the institution, and thus, the alumni organization along with the student services people could combine efforts to some degree. Bender et al. (1988:2) list other possible reasons for creating such a group and present

them in order of priority: first, to promote public relations; second, to help with fund raising, and finally, to provide a pool of volunteers when needed.

Continuing on, Kerns (1986:4) adds the notion that alumni can serve on curriculum advisory committees, thus providing a valuable function. Kerns also comments that alumni can be quite valuable at career day gatherings. In this last capacity, this writer's wife has participated in several career day events at McCook Community College, speaking to students about the work of a legal assistant. Like Bender, Kerns (1986:8) also sees fund raising as an alumni group function:

> Developing strong alumni networks should enhance fund raising instruments such as the annual fund-drive. This fund raising instrument relies on continuous broad-based support.

It appears, then, that there are several reasons for having some kind of alumni group at a two-year colleges. To restate them briefly, they are as follows:

1. It is one good form of external public relations for the institution;
2. Alumni can be helpful in various forms of fund raising;
3. It prompts an institution to maintain current address and phone data, thus making follow-up studies a bit easier;
4. Alumni can provide a scholarship or scholarships

for incoming students;

5. Alumni can provide volunteer help when needed - example - political contacts on legislation;
6. They can serve a valuable function as advisors on curriculum committees, and
7. They can act as resource people on career days.

Of these seven, numbers two and four deserve a final bit of attention. While a newly formed alumni group would be wise to avoid the "dollars" issue until a stable organization develops, eventually, financial contributions could become a goal. Such contributions could possibly become a piece (probably a small one) of the two-year college funding puzzle for the years ahead. Wattenbarger (1988:279) indicates that those years will require careful budgeting: "The financing of community colleges will require the best use of available resources in a none-to-perfect political milieu."

Since alumni groups in two-year colleges are relative newcomers to the scene, there appear to be no absolute methods of insuring success. However, those who have had at least some experience do offer helpful advice. First, the President of the college must be committed to the success (including funding) of the endeavor. Kopecek (1980:12-13) supports this belief and adds that "The college must assign a specific staff person to coordinate alumni affairs." Likewise, a writer for the ERIC Clearinghouse for Jr. and

Community Colleges (1984:2) agrees that a staff person must organize the alumni program. Once this person has been assigned the task, a definition of the term "alumni" is necessary and a data base must be organized.

An early task (one that is easy to make hasty assumptions about) is to define what alumni means in terms of the local institution. At an AACJC conference, one panel respondent, Ten Hoeve, offered the following idea:

> After arguing for a month we finally made an arbitrary decision that no one will be excluded. We made a decision that we would focus our interests on and declare an alumnus to be anyone who either had been at the institution one full semester or who had completed the equivalent of twelve hours of work, either in credit or non-credit components (McCracken et al.:4).

This is very similar to the current practice at McCook Community College. Initially, only those whose names appearing on past graduation bulletins were defined as alumni, but recently the definition has been broadened to include anyone who is interested in and supportive of MCC. Hence, the mailing list has been expanded to include "Alumni and Friends." However, at present, mailing lists for MCC contain, by and large, names of graduates, and the new "friends" category will be added from this time on. When considering the "community" nature of two-year colleges, probably the broader the definition of "alumni," the better.

Once the mailing list is organized, a publication of some type is in order. Several writers comment on the vital

necessity of an alumni newsletter or publication. Kopacek (1980:13) agrees saying, "A strong system of communication with alumni members is essential." Bender (1988:3) listed the alumni newsletter as being number one priority in terms of building an effective group, saying that "It supports respondents' public relations priority" (Bender, 1988:4). Of the different writers, Trent (1981:26) has the most to say on this topic:

> An alumni publication of quality should be your primary objective. You may not produce voluminous publications, but it must be well prepared, informative, and mailed at a regular schedule whether once a month, quarterly, or once a semester. Send other regular college publications to alumni. Alumni should receive some sort of information from the college at frequent intervals to serve as a reminder that the college knows who they are and considers them important.

With the mailing of the first alumni newsletter at MCC, special pains were taken to insure the kind of quality of content and appearance mentioned by Trent and others cited above. After the content was carefully screened and edited by four different readers, the MCC newsletter was printed on quality bond paper by a professional (local) printer. Those connected with the project were pleased with the results.

So, having the president's support, assigning one person to guide alumni affairs, and developing a newsletter are guideposts to the creation of an effective alumni organization. Having these in place, the staff person in charge will then need to make some program decisions. If the alumni group has formally organized as Trent (1981:25)

mentions, members of the group very much need to be part of the goal-setting and decision making. If not, the staff person could possibly establish a steering committee, composed of the president, the staff person, a student services administrator, and two or three energetic alumni. However it is done, decisions often have to be made about the scope of programming. For example, whether the alumni newsletter is intended to be the only activity could be a point of discussion.

Alumni associations having programs which actively involve members appear to be more dynamic and probably are more effective. In order to generate interest, Bender et al. (1988:6) urge anyone forming such an organization to discover what the alumni would like to do.

According to the literature, alumni appear to be attracted by at least three general groupings of activities. The first of these could easily be termed "social events." Rock (1979:119) lists events like travel tours, alumni reunions, and alumni awards; certainly these would fit under a social events heading. Bender et al. (1988:3) mention "pre-functions to college sponsored events." In general, these kinds of gatherings offer opportunities to socialize and have a good time.

The second grouping can be called "productive" or "functional" activities, where the alumni may be socializing but are also accomplishing some type of goal. Kopecek

(1980:4) lists serving on "professional or programmatic advisory committees" and "professional involvement with faculty through seminars and workshops" as being alumni functions. Other productive alumni activities, mentioned earlier in this document, would be serving on curriculum advisory councils, raising funds, generating scholarships, lobbying on behalf of the college, and serving as resource people on career days. A final purposeful activity would be for alumni to organize, elect officers, and provide help with association affairs.

The third area attracting alumni interest could be called "fringe benefits." Trent (1981:26) comments that "Providing the alumni with preferential access to such facilities as the library and athletic areas will motivate interest and support." Rock (1979:119) lists "special ticket prices" at college events as an additional benefit. Also, these same writers state that one of their institutions has tutoring services available free to students whose parents were alumni. Finally, Kopecek (1980:4) indicates the use of "tailored literature and publications concerning their program and/or profession" which would presumably be above and beyond the regular newsletter. All of these represent items which fall quite easily under a "fringe benefits of alumni" heading, their purpose being to maintain active alumni interest.

It is suggested in this literature review that alumni

associations in two-year colleges are a relatively new development, appearing only within the past fifteen to twenty years. One reason for this has to do with the fairly recent establishment of many two-year colleges; it takes some time before a pool of alumni is established. Second, with financing of community colleges growing more complex and difficult, many administrators are beginning to examine ways of supplementing already tight budgets. Third, as mentioned early on, two-year colleges need to establish and maintain strong ties to their communities and service areas; alumni associations provide one cog of the public relations mechanism.

Once established, alumni groups can serve a variety of functions including volunteer work, supplemental funding, providing scholarships, lobbying, participating in career days - to mention a few. Alumni groups which are functioning well often reflect these characteristics:

1. They have the support of the college president.
2. A staff member has been assigned to develop the organization.
3. An operational definition of alumni has been accomplished.
4. A data base of names and mailing addresses has been developed.
5. A quality newsletter is being sent to alumni.
6. The alumni have been surveyed to determine what

activities they would enjoy and pursue.

7. Active alumni groups often have social events and occasions where something productive is done. Also, some alumni groups receive special kinds of fringe benefits.

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Questionnaire
Survey to Assist in Alumni Association Development
at McCook Community College

I. Should there be a formal MCC alumni organization with elected officers?
( ) Yes
( ) No

II. Should there be an annual alumni social event?
( ) Yes
( ) No

III. Did you receive the first MCC alumni newsletter mailed in spring 1990?
( ) Yes
( ) No

IV. How would you rate the newsletter? (check one)
( ) Excellent
( ) Good
( ) Average
( ) Poor

V. What activities would you as an alumnus or friend of MCC support? **Please circle one response per item.**
I= interested S= somewhat interested N= not interested

A. Social

1.	Reunions	I	S	N
2.	Travel/tours	I	S	N
3.	Alumni night with college events	I	S	N
4.	Alumni band	I	S	N
5.	PTK Alumni gathering	I	S	N
6.	Alumni awards	I	S	N

B. Productive - Functional Activities

1. Funding an alumni scholarship	I	S	N
2. Serving as career day resource person	I	S	N
3. Serving on a curriculum advisory council	I	S	N
4. Lobbying on behalf of the college	I	S	N
5. Serving as an alumni officer or committee member	I	S	N
6. Encouraging potential students to attend MCC	I	S	N

C. Fringe Benefits for Alumni

1. Library services	I	S	N
2. Computer lab (when available)	I	S	N
3. Special alumni rates for college events			
4. Receive copies of "The Indian" (college newspaper)	I	S	N

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